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Commentary on Geoffrey C. Goddu's "Refining Hitchcock's Definition of 'Argument'" and James B. Freeman's Commentary

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Reflection on G. C. Goddu's paper on this CD, as well as on Freeman's commentary on it, suggests the following five desiderata for a definition of argument, in the sense of a premise-conclusion complex:

Ontological status: Arguments in the sense of premise-conclusion complexes are better construed as abstract objects than as acts. Although arguing for a position by giving supporting reasons is an act, its content can be the content of other acts, such as collaborative inquiry or deliberation (i.e. co-construction), explanation of one's reasons for holding a position, and solo reasoning. Since premise-conclusion complexes have properties of theoretical interest apart from their embedding in a communicative or mental act, we should define what it is to be such a complex independently of any such embedding. Hence a premise-conclusion complex is not a type of discourse, contrary to my claim in (Hitchcock, 2007).

Conditions of actualization: Accidental concatenations of speech acts and illatives should not count as expressions of a premise-conclusion complex. A simple premise-conclusion complex is actualized only when it is the content of a complex illocutionary or mental act in which an individual or group infers the conclusion from the premises. And so on for complex premise-conclusion structures. We need a clear account of the relation of inferring.

Components: The components of premise-conclusion complexes should be described in such a way as to correspond to the way such complexes are actualized in discourse and in thinking. In particular, there needs to be room for (1) suppositional reasoning, of various kinds, with a distinction between asserted and supposed premises; (2) all the types of speech acts introduced by an inferential 'therefore' or its equivalent; (3) modal qualifiers of the assertion of premises and the drawing of conclusions; and (4) mention of defeaters, counters to defeaters, and so on.

Separation: So-called divergent arguments should be treated as separate arguments, one for each conclusion drawn. Similarly, independent arguments for a single conclusion should be treated as separate arguments; for example, the five ways in which Thomas Aquinas argues for the existence of God (*Summa Theologica* I.Q2.A3) are five arguments, not one complex argument.

Computational implementation: The definition of a premise-conclusion complex should lend itself to computational implementation, for example in an argument interchange format like that being developed in the field of artificial intelligence (Chesñevar, McGinnis, Modgil, Rahwan, Reed, Simari, South, Vreeswijk and Willmott 2006).

[Link to commentary 1](#)

[Link to paper](#)

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- Chesñevar, C., J. McGinnis, S. Modgil, I. Rahwan, C. Reed, G. Simari, M. South, G. Vreeswijk and S. Willmott (2006). Towards an argument interchange format. *The Knowledge Engineering Review* 21, 293-316.
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